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ABSTRACT

A project was conducted to improve the vocational teacher education program at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Project activities were based on five objectives. To meet the first objective of revitalizing recruitment strategies for the program, three brochures and a recruiting poster were developed. The materials were to be sent to all high school and community college vocational directors in northern Illinois. To meet the second objective of developing inservice and preservice strategies, more attention was paid to methods classes. To meet the third objective of improving relationships among university departments involved with teacher education and with teacher education programs at other universities in the state, two symposia were sponsored, focusing on legislation and integrating academics. To meet the fourth objective, an assessment of the program was made, identifying strengths in faculty, curriculum, location, and communications, and weaknesses in low enrollment, recruitment needs, and plan and materials. Recommendations were made for improving recruitment practices, revising curriculum, and increasing enrollment. To meet the final objective, NIU mentoring was examined and was shown to have some merit but to be not practical for continuation at the time. The project's chief benefit was the interaction of the project staff and renewal of enthusiasm. (Appendixes, half the document, are summary discussions of integration of academic and vocational education and of the applicability to vocational education of the Paideia Proposal, which bases curriculum on great books.) (KC)

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
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Improving Vocational Teacher Education at Northern Illinois University

Final Report

"The vocational teacher education programs of Northern Illinois University need considerable attention. At a time when teacher shortages are expected in the near future, the vocational teacher education programs of Northern Illinois University are struggling to maintain their existence."

Those two sentences began the proposal submitted for consideration. The general conditions, over the last year, have worsened not only in the state, but across the nation. The situation at Northern Illinois University is improved in some areas and unchanged in others. The following discussion will be organized according to objective as listed in the proposal.

Objective:

I. Revitalize recruitment strategies for vocational teacher education (VTE) programs at NIU.

To meet this objective three brochures and one recruiting poster were developed. Business Education had never had a brochure and the ones for Home Economics Education were outdated. Technology Education had recently revised a brochure so decided nothing further was needed there. These brochures are in process and are scheduled for completion by August 1, 1991.

The recruitment poster includes a short description of each of the three programs, Business Education, Home Economics Education and Technology Education with cards which can be returned to NIU in order to obtain additional information. The poster is also in process.

For materials to be effective, a plan was devised. The poster will be sent to each high school and community college vocational director in northern Illinois. Each poster will be accompanied by a cover letter explaining our objectives and asking them to post in a prominent place. Conversations with Community College Relations offices have secured assurances that any and all materials put in the director's hands will be distributed to program directors and students. Teacher educators will use the brochures in two ways: 1) to distribute at professional meetings, enlisting the aid of high school teachers in recruiting students into vocational Teacher Education programs, and 2) to send to prospective students who make inquiries about the programs.

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Probably the most lasting results of meeting this objective have been the reading done by project staff and the resulting discussions. Each of the four read different parts of the literature and then each contributed from their readings to the discussions. In this way more literature was covered than if all had read the same material.

Again, in conference attendance we each attended different conferences or at least different sessions so that we were gathering ideas to be shared.

II. Develop pre-service and in-service strategies for NIU VTE programs that focus on integrating academic and vocational education.

Reading, discussions and sharing revealed some ambivalent feelings in this area as each of the three departments has been practicing many of the recommendations for some time.

Faculty included in the "Methods" classes ways and means of emphasizing math, science and communication skills in appropriate areas. With in-service groups, rewriting the objectives is necessary while with pre-service groups assistance is needed in planning activities for classroom presentation and activities which emphasize the application of academics.

Two thoughtful short essays by Gene Roth (see Appendix A) were produced.

III. Foster improved relationships among NIU VTE departments, other NIU departments involved with teacher education, and teacher education programs at other universities in Illinois.

Relationships among VTE, other departments and colleges were enhanced by sponsoring two symposia. The first was with Pat Welsh, state senator, who discussed vocational education, education and legislation. The second was with Jim Guilinger who discussed the agriculture plan for revitalization. Many points from his remarks have potential for use in other areas, particularly with home economics. Ideas have been shared with professional organizations getting mixed reviews.

This project focused attention on recruitment and integrating academics as the project staff attended conferences and entered into discussions with other attenders choices were made to include those topics.

IV. Conduct an assessment of vocational teacher education programs, identifying strengths, weakness and areas needing improvement.

Each of the three departments had recently completed a program review, ISBE review and NCATE review. These three self-studies gave ample evidence of strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths	Weaknesses
dedicated faculty	low enrollment
strong curriculum	need for recruitment
location near a major population center	plan and materials
communications with other programs	

Needs Improvement

recruitment practices - both a plan and materials have been developed.

curriculum - curriculum revision is a constant process. Two departments completed curriculum changes.

enrollment - during this first year each of the three departments saw modest improvement in the spring. As the recruitment plan is put into operation and the new materials are distributed an increase should be noted.

V. Examine NIU mentoring program and determine the benefit of programs for students in the pre-service teacher education programs.

NIU has a mentoring program which is gaining some acceptance by both students and faculty. The major obstacle to the growth of the program seems to be time. While the faculty in the three departments are convinced of the merits of a mentoring program it was decided that establishing a formal mentoring program for vocational education at this time is not feasible.

To summarize the accomplishments of this project, we come out with tangibles in the form of the brochures and recruitment poster. While these are important and certainly will be (are) useful their influence has a limited life span. Of much more importance are the intangibles, the interactions of the project staff as they grabbled with ideas and applications of those ideas into our individual program; the interactions of project staff with other professionals at professional meetings and through other avenues; and the renewed enthusiasms of four teacher educators as they continue to work with pre and in-service vocational educators.

Appendix A

Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2854

Office for Vocational,
Technical and
Career Education
155 Gabel Hall
815 753 1306

TO: Betty Schroeder, Dennis Stoia, Helen Winsor,

FROM: Gene L. Roth

DATE: September 13, 1990

SUBJECT: Regarding Integration of academic and vocational education as a topic for preservice and inservice programs.

One of the objectives for our funded project pertains to developing preservice and inservice strategies, for integrating academic and vocational education content. I am struggling with this idea. I like to see change occur in vocational education when it is based on the outcomes of research and supported by data. In this instance, change is being guided by new federal legislation that will encourage local schools to build a coordinated sequence of academic and vocational content into it's programs. I am not opposed to this notion. Historically the strongest vocational education programs are those in which students have been well grounded in the basics of education prior to entering the vocational discipline. That product will still sell.

Congress could have looked at the track record of such programs and said, "OK, vocational education programs to be successful they must be rigorous, and only enroll those students who score in the upper 50 percentile on basic skill pretests." By setting such standards, we will be assured of graduating vocational education students who will do well in the work force.

However, congress does not expect vocational education programs to start with the best students. It has specifically targeted special populations to be the recipients of the bulk of federal vocational education dollars. Recognizing that these special populations might lack the basic skills needed to succeed in the work force, congress has emphasized that vocational educators must integrate academic content into the curriculum. Practitioners and researchers must now sit back and reflect, "What the hell does this mean?"

Not knowing what this fully means, the Illinois Department of Adult Vocational and Technical Education expects vocational teacher education programs at universities to build content into its curriculum that reflects this integration emphasis. One must ask,"Why? On what basis should we change how we prepare teachers?" Knowledge may be arbitrarily categorized or classified according to a number of themes, topics, or headings. Perhaps a greater emphasis on curriculum theory is in order as opposed to the mixing of knowledge from arbitrarily segregated disciplines.

I have a concern that vocational educators are jumping on a ship and they don't know where it's going. Vocational educators are responding to requests for proposals, attending seminars and workshops, and attempting to alter their curriculum in response to this legislated push to integrate academic education into vocational education. From my frame of reference, no one has satisfactorily examined the question, "Why?"

Perhaps we should try to answer a few questions before we jump on the boat. The following questions might serve as starting points:

1. What is the underlying basis for developing an integrative unit of instruction? Is covering course content the major goal? Perhaps the

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interdisciplinary unit should instead focus on the developmental needs of the learner. Perhaps vocational educators should examine real life concepts, such as, conflict, competition, relationships with peers, or the responsibilities of citizenship and use them as a unifying theme for integrative units of instruction.

2. Vocational education has traditionally served as an applied learning laboratory. How can these applied learning laboratories be best put to use for integrative lessons?

3. Educators are often challenged to build active linkages between bodies of knowledge. What disciplines should we attempt to link together and what are the relationships among the knowledge represented by these disciplines?

4. What must a high school student study to achieve a coherent view of the world? Is vocational education worth while for students? Is it merely a holding pool for low achievers? Is it detrimental to students because it reduces the number of academic courses they can take? Does it encourage inquiry? Should high schools deliver job specific training? Are high schools suited to deliver such training? Does it fit within their mission? Can vocational education contribute to a liberally educated person? Does vocational education merely focus on decoding and retention?

5. Most writers on integrative curriculum stress the importance of organizing concepts or centers upon which various disciplines can form linkages. It is important that these organizing centers are vital to the content of each discipline. Has anyone identified these centers for vocational education? Has research been conducted to identify such organizing concepts?

6. Education has always been concerned with the relationship of school to life. Perhaps a centering focus for integrative curriculum should be the relationship of vocation to people, as a means of self expression for their ideas and ideals. A centering concept might be the relationship of vocation to the sound personal growth of an individual and his or her expected social service. This might mean an expansion for vocational education to include social service and volunteerisum. This might shift the emphasis for vocational education away from preparing students for entry level jobs with job specific training. Instead, vocational education would be focusing on career development and job readiness.

7. How can vocational education contribute to the education of youth for responsible citizenship when it encourages an early occupational specialization?

In closing, integrative (not integrated) curriculum has a broader meaning to most educators than merely mixing applied physics, communications or math with vocational education. If vocational educators are attempting to link with other educators to create integrative curriculum, then perhaps they could benefit from a common understanding what this term means. As a faculty, until we understand what it means, we cannot condone it as a part of our preservice and inservice programs.

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Office for Vocational,
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Career Education
155 Gabel Hall
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TO: Betty Schroeder, Dennis Stoia, Helen Winsor

FROM: Gene L. Roth

DATE: September 25, 1990

SUBJECT: The Paideia Proposal

I have spent this last week reviewing The Paideia Bulletins and a book titled The Paideia Program that Helen loaned me last week. The Paideia Proposal is a concept endorsed by a group of educators who believe a child's education should be grounded in the great books. There appears to be several schools that endorse this philosophical underpinning and it sounds as though they have attempted to reach all types of students with this educational approach.

The Paideia Group staunchly believes that there should be no vocational education at the high school level. Their concern is that young people must become acquainted with the great books and that the high school curriculum is not an appropriate place to begin narrow technical training.

I imagine that most vocational educators would bristle at the suggestions of the Paideia Group and immediately begin defensive arguments. Arguments might be as follows:

1. Not all students can benefit from an education based on the great books.

2. Vocational education serves the individual needs of students.

3. Vocational education can serve those students who are not college bound.

4. Vocational education can provide an applied learning environment for re-enforcing basic skills.

5. Vocational education bridges the gap between school and work, and can be used to encourage students to stay in school.

Such are the typical arguments provided by vocational educators. However, as Jeanie Oakes pointed out several years ago, these arguments are merely unsubstantiated claims. We have no data nor research findings that support any of them. Who is to say that an excellent vocational education program can back up these claims any better than an excellent Paideia Program?

Rather than being defensive against the idea of an education based on the great books, perhaps vocational educators would be wiser if they examined such an education and tried to extract ideas from it that would strengthen vocational education. In my opinion there appears to be much in

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the content and methods of the Paideia Program that should be borrowed by vocational educators. Let's begin with content. Why are the great books chosen for discussion groups in the Paideia Programs? They are chosen because they are difficult to understand not only for the students but also for the teachers. Everyone must put forth a great effort to understand them. Their value to many societies has been proven over a long period of time. The Paideia Group believes that a book should not be chosen for seminar discussions for any other reason than it's challenging character. The reader must have to put forth a considerable effort in order to lift up one's own mind from understanding less to understanding more. Books are not chosen for the Paideia Program if they are easy to read and discuss. The intent is to go beyond what the students already think because the instruction is intended to extend students' perceptions and challenge their ideas. The learning is intended to go beyond just self expression of the teacher and students. The intent is to extend and clarify the mind of the student. The Paideia Group believes that the challenging and difficult content of the great books must be used as the catalyst for the pursuit of knowledge by students.

What about the methods that are used in the Paideia Program? Teachers in such programs are encouraged to use a combination of seminars and coaching to facilitate learning. A seminar approach is one in which students are encouraged to challenge opinions; ideas should be valued according to their supporting arguments and evidence. Learners are told about the responsibilities that go along with thinking. In other words, shoddy thinking or lazy thinking is not tolerated. Students challenge the text and challenge each other. A seminar leader tries to get the discussion in some way or form moving from opinion toward knowledge. There is less concern by the teacher about a set amount of content to be covered. An attempt is made to distinguish between information and knowledge and between memory and mind. The growth of the mind and the development of it's essential skills are the objectives of such schooling. Retaining information is really the least valuable of all of the goods of the mind, especially if it requires little explanation or interpretation.

I believe vocational educators can learn a great deal by closely examining the methods and content used by the Paideia Program. Secondary vocational education must contribute to the goals of a high school education. Those goals include responsible citizenship, the capacity for either work or continuing education, responsibilities of parenthood, and engagement in the life long pleasure of learning.

The Paideia Group believes that a liberal education is the best means for achieving the preceding goals. They encourage students to receive a foundation in so called generative subjects. Subjects are called generative because knowledge of them generates more knowledge and deeper understanding. I wonder what criteria should be used to categorize subjects as those that generate the most knowledge and deeper understanding? I wonder which groupings of knowledge are of most value to high school students? For example, is appreciation of the performing arts a kind of knowledge that is or should be of greater value than knowledge and skill in architectural design?

The Council For Basic Education believes that all high school students should be able to do the following:

1. Command language in all its forms-reading, writing, speaking-and use them all; read a sophisticated daily newspaper; and discern accuracy, sound reasoning, honesty, and bias in written and spoken language.

2. Display sufficient mathematical sophistication to understand basic computation and its use for problem-solving; understand probabilities and statistics as they are used to shape public policy; and have the capacity to distinguish between statistics that are valid and those that can mislead.

3. Understand basic scientific principles and concepts as they relate to the environment, medicine, energy, and nutrition; apply the principles of scientific experimentation for the purpose of analyzing and solving problems; and consider the capabilities and potential of scientific discovery and inquiry with possible ethical or public-policy implications.

4. Be conversant in the ideas that have shaped our democratic system of government and Constitution; understand the corollary attributes of citizens' rights and responsibilities and the evolution of the government's role in protecting rights; view our society as an unfinished work in progress through knowledge of our successes and failures; and understand that history is not static, but should be interpreted as it relates to the present and future, as well as to other events in the past.

5. Understand that we live in a global community; exhibit a general knowledge of the history, geography, and culture of other societies, both Western and non-Western; appreciate diversity in our own and other societies; draw chronological and spatial connections between events; and show reasoned judgment in interpreting the significance of historical events and problems.

6. Communicate in a second language and exhibit understanding of at least one other culture; speakers whose second language is English should have maintained proficiency in their native tongues.

7. Appreciate literature, music, and visual and performing arts for their aesthetic, cultural, historical, and moral value; understand that the arts are not the possession of a cultural elite, but are integral to knowing ourselves and to developing moral judgment and sympathies by providing insight into the enduring themes of humanity; and be part of an informed audience for the arts and critical consumers of mass culture.

I don't believe it is appropriate for vocational educators to argue about the preceding educational goals for high school students. However, I believe it is important for us to study the preceding seven educational goals and attempt to interpret how vocational education might best be used to contribute to these goals. One thing I am learning-- the more I examine and study what it means to be a liberally educated person, the more our goals to integrate academic and vocational education becomes complex and abstract.

At the last meeting I offered to find a definition or something close to it for the term integrated or integrative curriculum. Paul Dressel was

one of the first to use this term over thirty years ago. He viewed integrative curriculum as being comprised of two separate parts. First, the learners would gain a unified view of commonly accepted knowledge. Second, the learners' power to perceive and create new relationships for themselves would be enhanced. Dressel perceived the first function to be derived by an integrated curriculum. The second creative function allowed learners to develop their own structures for understanding the world of knowledge. The term integrative curriculum (as used by Dressel) did not imply the need for using traditional academic disciplines as starting points for seeking cognitive unity. For an integrative curriculum, the disciplines as categorizations represent merely one of numerous ways to organize knowledge. The categorization that we currently have for disciplines (categorizations such as vocational education, social studies, science) offer only one of many ways to organize our thinking about the world.